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MARTIN LUTHER AND JUSTIFICATION \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ A Paper Presented to Dr.

Dongsun Cho Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for SYSTH 3013 B \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by Yu Park April 21, 2009 Martin Luther and new perspective justification Introduction Justification means that God declares us righteous by his grace. [1] Historically, this issue was started when Martin Luther separated from the Roman Catholic Church. [2] Martin Luther’s understanding of justification was one of the main dividing points in the record of Christian theology. In his production of the German New Testament in 1521 his translation of Romans 3: 28 was, “ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law. ”[3] This interpretation and the emphasis on the word “ alone” was to cause a conflict with Catholic doctrinal views on the issue and an essential rift in doctrine. The reaction to the doctrine of “ faith alone” or Sola fide from the Catholic Church was in the extreme.

“ Great abuse was piled upon both Luther and his doctrine because of this single word, alone. He was accused of falsifying the Scriptures, of adding to the Bible, and of destroying the historic faith of the Catholic Church. For Rome and its authoritative magisterium this settled it—Martin Luther was a heretic! He plainly added to the dogma of Christ! ”[4] The different views on Justification Roland Bainton in his writings Here I Stand, states that, “ One might take the date June 25, 1530, the day when the Augsburg Confession was publicly read, as the death day of the Holy Roman Empire. From this day forward the two confessions stood over against each other, poised for conflict. [5] There were to be following attempts at peace between the two views and a preliminary agreement was reached in 1541 on different articles of faith. However, at the Council of Trent in 1543 this was to change and this document is filled with various refutations or “ anathemas” of the teaching of Luther and the pronouncements of the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Confession was in effect a, “ central document of the Lutheran reformation, which was a reaction against the Roman Catholic Church.

[6] It was initially written in German and Latin and presented at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 by the princes of Saxony. The Confession was a call by The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to “…explain their religious convictions in order to resolve the question of reformation, and rally support against the Turkish invasion. ”[7] The Council of Trent document, on the other hand, was the “… answer to the Protestant Reformation”[8] and it was also “…an answer, at least in part, to the desire for inner moral and spiritual renewal of the Church. [9] The Doctrine of justification is an essential point of doctrinal discussion and argument and has been described as an area of separation between two Christian traditions which had”… basically defined themselves over and against each other largely on the basis of this doctrine. “[10] Before a comparison of the two views on justification in the Augsburg Confession and the Council of Trent can be entered into it is vital to interpret the message and importance of justification by faith alone; and in particular the way that Luther saw justification and its relation to faith. In essence Martin Luther was concerned with a “ quest for a God who was gracious, not simply a stern judge.

”[11] This was further linked to the critique of indulgences and their link as a source of salvation. There was therefore a response to the idea of “ Good Works” as a source of salvation. In other words, for Luther, as is evidenced in the Augsburg Confession, “…Justification has to do with saving righteousness in God’s part. Such justification is received in and by faith. The emphasis on justification by faith became common coin among the Reformers and their confessions. ”[12] The meaning of faith, in its relationship to justification, therefore had a great significance for Luther and Protestantism.

This deeper significance is an important component of understanding the connection between justification and faith as it is expressed in the Augsburg Confession. Faith in this context is not only, “…mere belief in the being of a God, nor in the historical fact that Christ has come on earth, suffered and ascended. Nor is it the submission of the reason to mysteries, nor the sort of trust which is required for exercising the gift of miracles. Nor, again, is it the knowledge and acceptance of the sacred truths of the New Testament, even the atonement…”[13] It is further specifically “…a spiritual principle, altogether different from anything we have by nature, endued with a divine life and efficacy, and producing a radical change in the soul. [14] The former provides an understanding into the fundamental difference in these two points of view from the two texts under discussion. In essence, and somewhat simplistically, the two views are opposed on the basis of a central and underlying difference in emphasis. On the one hand “ love” or good faith is seen for the Protestant point of view as the sure and only foundation of justification before God; in the other hand the Trent document emphasizes the catholic preoccupation with law or the more traditional elements necessary for justification.

These aspects or differences in understanding and interpretation are key in understanding the conflict between the two documents under discussion. The insistence on the faith of faith and faith alone without the need for any extraneous aspects is strongly emphasized in the Augsburg Confession. “ In the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles, as well as later in the twentieth, they condemn us for teaching that people receive the forgiveness of sins not on account of their own merits but freely on account of Christ, by faith in Him. They condemn us both for denying that people receive the forgiveness of sins on account of their own merits and for affirming that people receive the forgiveness of sins by faith and are justified by faith in Christ. ”[15] The council of Trent The Council of Trent document however states very clearly that the main dispute and objection to the previous view of justification lies in the perceived erosion of formality, the importance of acceptable behavior and “ good works”. The objection to the concept of faith alone is stated in this document as follows. This means that we are absolved before the judgment of God, adopted as sons, and received into life eternal not because of the obedience of Christ but on account of our love, so that the grace of God is only the logical cause, and the obedience of Christ only the meritorious cause, that from these we may have in ourselves some inherent thing which we can plead against the judgment of God, in which we must trust, that on account of it, and not on account of Christ, we are absolved, adopted as children of God, and receive the heritage of life eternal. [16] The above extract implies, and this position is argued further in the document , that the main message of “ faith alone “ in the Augsburg Confession is little more than an effort to bypass the necessity of acknowledging the significance of moral behavior and the adherence to law as an important aspect of justification.

The document refers to the view taken by the Augsburg Confession. “ They affirm that the justification of the ungodly before God to life eternal is not only the forgiveness of sins but also the sanctification of the internal man. And they maintain that the only formal cause of justification is the righteousness donated to us by God, by which we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, so that we are not only reputed to be, but truly are called, and are, righteous, receiving righteousness in ourselves, which they say is the love inhering in us, which the Holy Spirit works in us through the merit of the suffering of Christ. ”[17] Augsburg Confession In contradistinction to the opinion expressed by the Council of Trent, the text of the Augsburg Confession elsewhere clearly states the position of justifications by faith alone.

Luther puts all of this very succinctly in scores of places. He writes, for example, “..

. actual justifying (formalis iustificatio) is left to faith alone, since without faith neither God nor Christ nor anything else is profitable for righteousness. ”[18] Another area within the texts that is central to the exposition of differences in the meaning of justification and faith is the reaction to and relevance of reason and rationality, as well as philosophy, as determining aspects.

The following extract from the Augsburg Confession clearly illustrates this important aspect in its rejection of reason as a factor in justification. “ Here the scholastics in line with the philosophers teach only the righteousness of reason, namely, civil works. In addition, they fabricate the idea that reason, without the Holy Spirit, can love God above all things. Now as long as the human mind is undisturbed and does not feel God’s wrath or judgment, it can imagine that it wants to love God and that it wants to do good for God’s sake. [19] Note the emphasis on the rejection of the “ righteousness of reason” and “ civil works” as factors in the estimation of faith and justification. As the above extract intimates, these aspects are impediments to the act of pure faith that leads to justification. This is an extremely important point, which is continually emphasized in the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg confession continues to critique the role of reason in justification.

The pertinent question is asked. But let the discerning reader consider only this: if this is Christian righteousness, what is the difference between philosophy and the teaching of Christ? If we merit the forgiveness of sins by these elicited acts of ours, what does Christ provide? ”[20] The text continues to reiterate this argument and starkly asks the following rhetorical question. “ If we can be justified through reason and the works of the reason, why do we need Christ or regeneration? ”[21] This section of the ext concludes with the view that the Protestant faith should not be berated or ridiculed for seeking “… another righteousness beyond that offered by philosophy. We have heard of some who, having laid aside the gospel, expound on the Ethics of Aristotle in their sermons. ”[22] This, from the point of view of the Confession, clearly and conclusively suggests the rationale for the importance of faith alone in terms of justification, by pointing out the seeming irrelevance of reason or rules that are created by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, this aspect clearly implicates the Catholic Church and the Council of Trent as those “ opponents who teach nothing but the righteousness of reason or at the very least, the righteousness of the law, upon which they focus their attention just as the Jews did upon the hidden face of Moses (2 Cor. 3: 13).

”[23] They are also termed as “ complacent hypocrites” who “… arouse a presumptuous and futile trust in works as well as a contempt for the grace of Christ. ”[24] This statement goes to the heart of the augment against the views expressed in the Council of Trent writings. Another aspect also expressed in the Augsburg Confession was of very real concern to the Protestant faith at the time. “ Conversely, they drive frightened consciences to despair who beset by doubt, can never experience what faith is and how efficacious it is. In the end they utterly despair. ”[25] This was seen as a cardinal aspect which supported the argument for a return to a form of pure untrammeled faith, rather then in theories of formalism, creeds and law. This aspect is reinforced by further rhetoric and discussion in the Confession; with the emphasis for justification focused on Christ as the only mediator.

… our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for us, for this happens only through faith, that is, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who alone is the mediator who reconciles the Father..

… ”[26] The response to the above argument for the primacy of faith alone in justification was strongly countered by the Council of Trent. The central argument is the usurpation of law and the importance of righteous actions as essential ingredients in the process of justification. The text states that “ under the threat of many curses” the Protestant writers of the Augsburg Confession “…want to ascribe the justification of a person before God to life eternal to that same thing from which Scripture removes and takes it away with the clearest statements, namely, to the newness, love, or complete works of the regenerate.

”[27] The reason for this view is only clearly understood in relation to the underlying Catholic doctrine of genesis and original sin. As described in the Council of Trent, Canon 4, for the catholic faith justification is; …a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of “ the adoption of the sons of God,” through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And this translation, since the promulgation of the Gospel, can not be effected, without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof, as it is written: “ unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not reach into the Kingdom of God. [28] The foregoing illustrates the Catholic faith and emphasis on the traditional aspects of justification as well as the law and “ works”. As Canon 4 of the Trent document points out, for the Catholic faith justification must occur through the sacraments, especially the sacrament of baptism.

This approach is opposed by the spirit of the Augsburg Confession with its view that faith alone is sufficient for justification. Importantly, the views on justification in the Council of Trent text are firmly based on the Catholic doctrine of adherence to the Scriptures, or the Catholic interpretation thereof. Catholics believe there are many problems with claiming people are “ justified by faith alone.

” Perhaps the biggest is the fact that the formula does not actually appear in scripture, except in one verse which says people are “ not justified by faith alone” (James 2: 24). ”[29] Some critics have suggested that the debate between these two viewpoints is based on problematic perceptions of the relationship between the idea of sanctification and justification. “ The term ‘ faith alone’ is theologically unnecessary, and is used only because of the erroneous beliefs of those who think that faith can be augmented with works. [30] This approach is more clearly expressed in the following: “ No sacrament or any church ritual is at all relevant in this matter; full justification takes place at the moment a sinner admits sin and trusts in the sacrifice of Christ who took the punishment for that sin.

Sanctification is what follows as a result of gratitude for justification already completed; it must never be confused with justification. Justification is the precursor, pre-requisite and efficient cause of sanctification. ”[31] Conclusion The above tends to support the Augsburg Confession and the view that faith alone is the primary requisite for justification. Possibly the realistic response to this controversy lies in fully understanding the depth of Luther’s perceptions of faith in justification. Justification for Luther is a non-dualistic and complex concept, which cannot be subsumed or related to formal doctrine or “ works” of any sort. Justification is something which is both internal and external at the same time. “ To be outside of us means not to be derived from our powers.

Righteousness is our possession, to be sure, since it was given to us out of mercy. Nevertheless, it is alien to us, because we have not merited it. [32] From this perspective, as is illustrated in the sentiments of the Augsburg Confession, there can be no reference to reason or “ Good Works”; as these aspects are seen as elements which are extraneous and in particular opposite to the real nature of justification as outlined in the Augsburg Confession and elsewhere.

The Trent text however insists that justification can only properly, and in terms of scriptural correctness, be understood within the parameters of scriptural form and law and that without these aspects justification loses its intrinsic theological validity. Although there have been more current attempts to harmonize these two opposing views, yet these views are possibly the result of very different worldviews and lie deeply embedded in different religious expectations and understandings, which exist at a much deeper and more difficult level than these two texts outwardly suggest. BIBLIOGRAPHY Books Berhold, Fred Basic Sources of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962. Plass, Ewald M. What Luther Says. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

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